Mattie and the Dragon

The Original Illustrated Storybook

This story has been around for a few decades and has been published in a Canadian anthology, an English parenting magazine, and a few American papers. But it was only with the advent of the free AI illustration service in Chat GBT that this first illustrated storybook was made possible.

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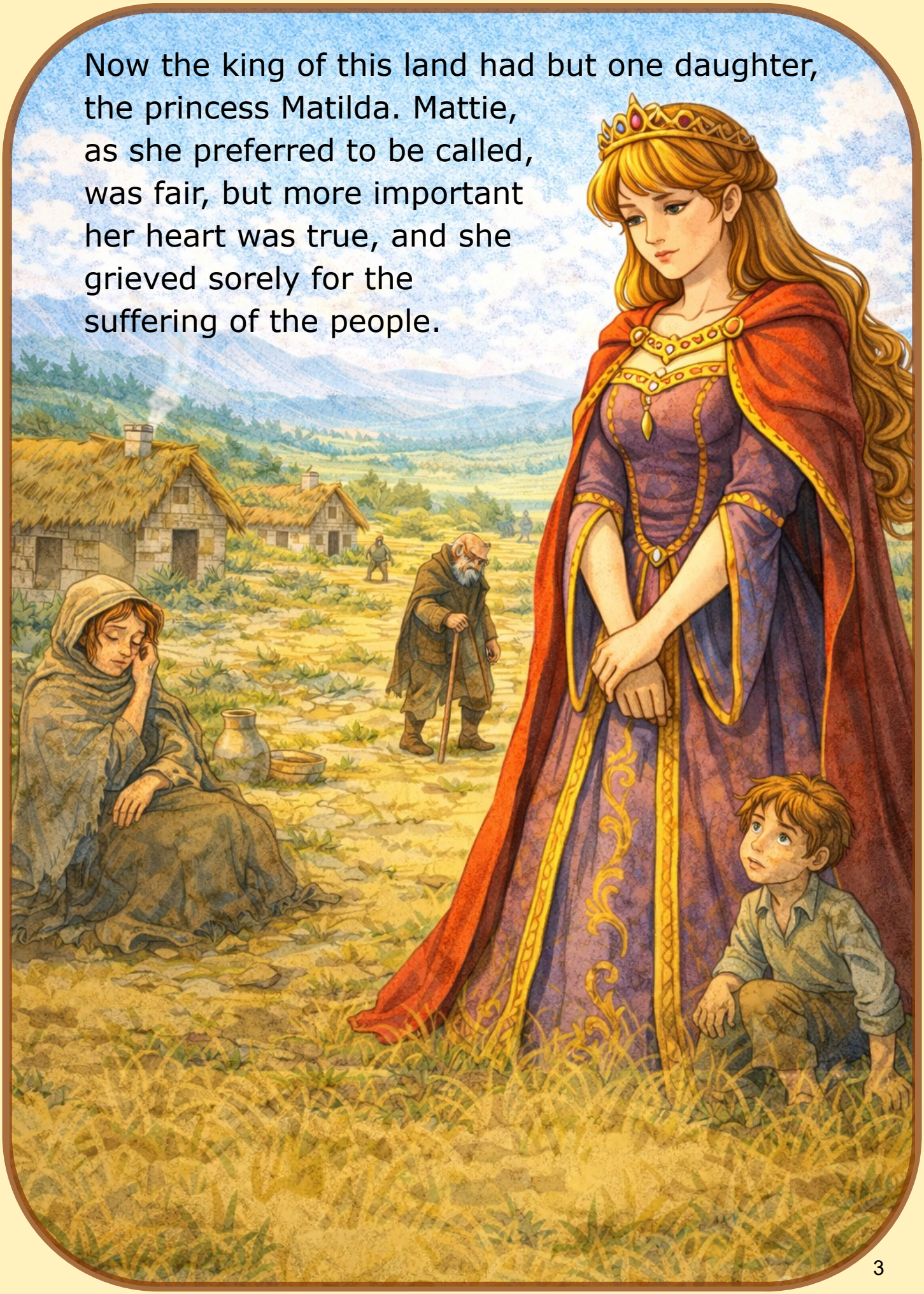
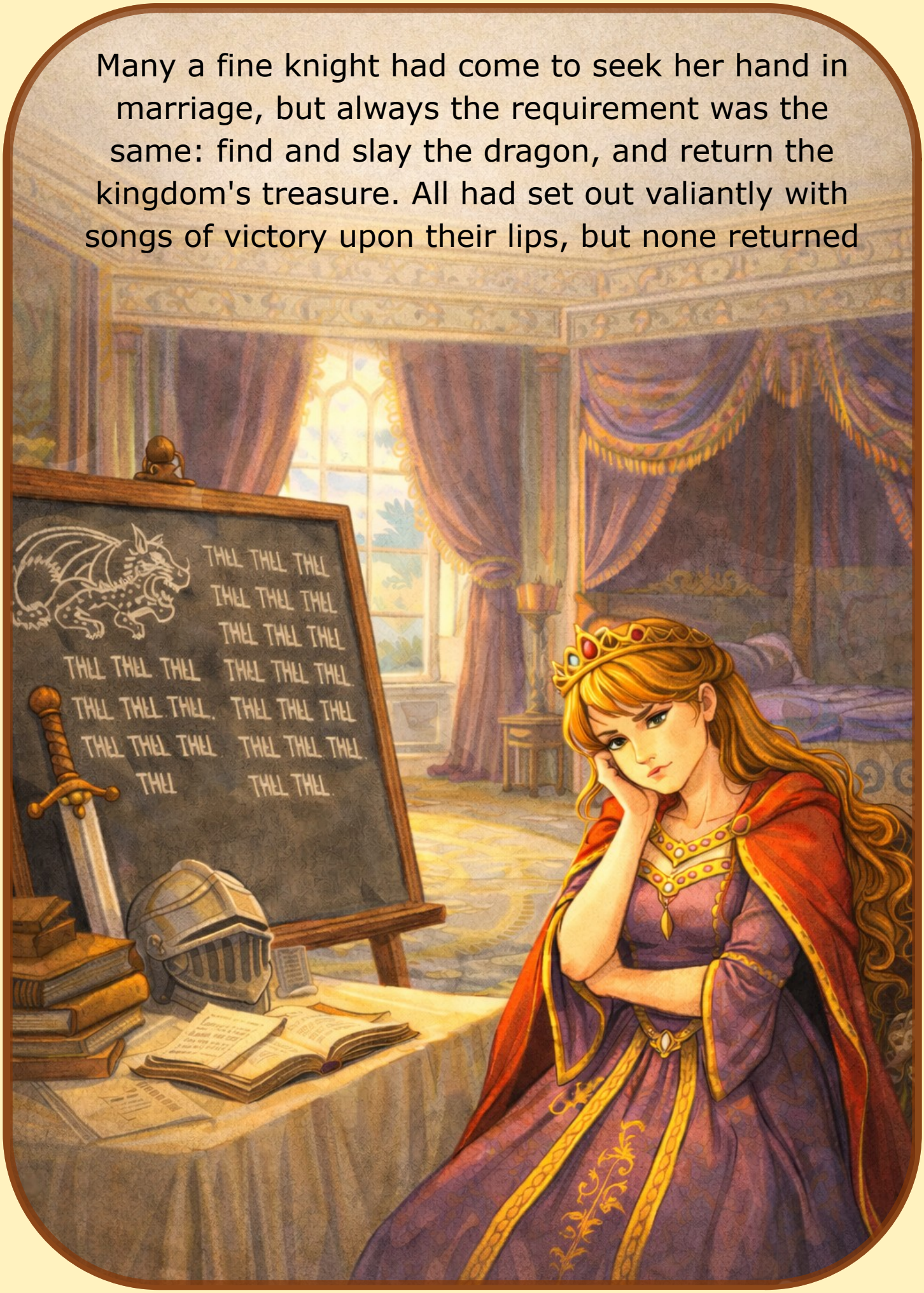
The anonymous author can be contacted at
Mattie.and.the.dragon@gmail.com

Long ago, in a distant land
there was an impoverished kingdom
ruled by a kind but not very powerful king.

Many generations ago the treasure of the land had been stolen by a fierce dragon, and ever since the people had eked out a meager living as best they could. But the sparkle had disappeared from their eyes, the birds' song had lost its sweetness, and the sun no longer had the power to warm their weary bones.


Now the king of this land had but one daughter, the princess Matilda. Mattie, as she preferred to be called, was fair, but more important her heart was true, and she grieved sorely for the suffering of the people.

Many a fine knight had come to seek her hand in marriage, but always the requirement was the same: find and slay the dragon, and return the kingdom's treasure. All had set out valiantly with songs of victory upon their lips, but none returned

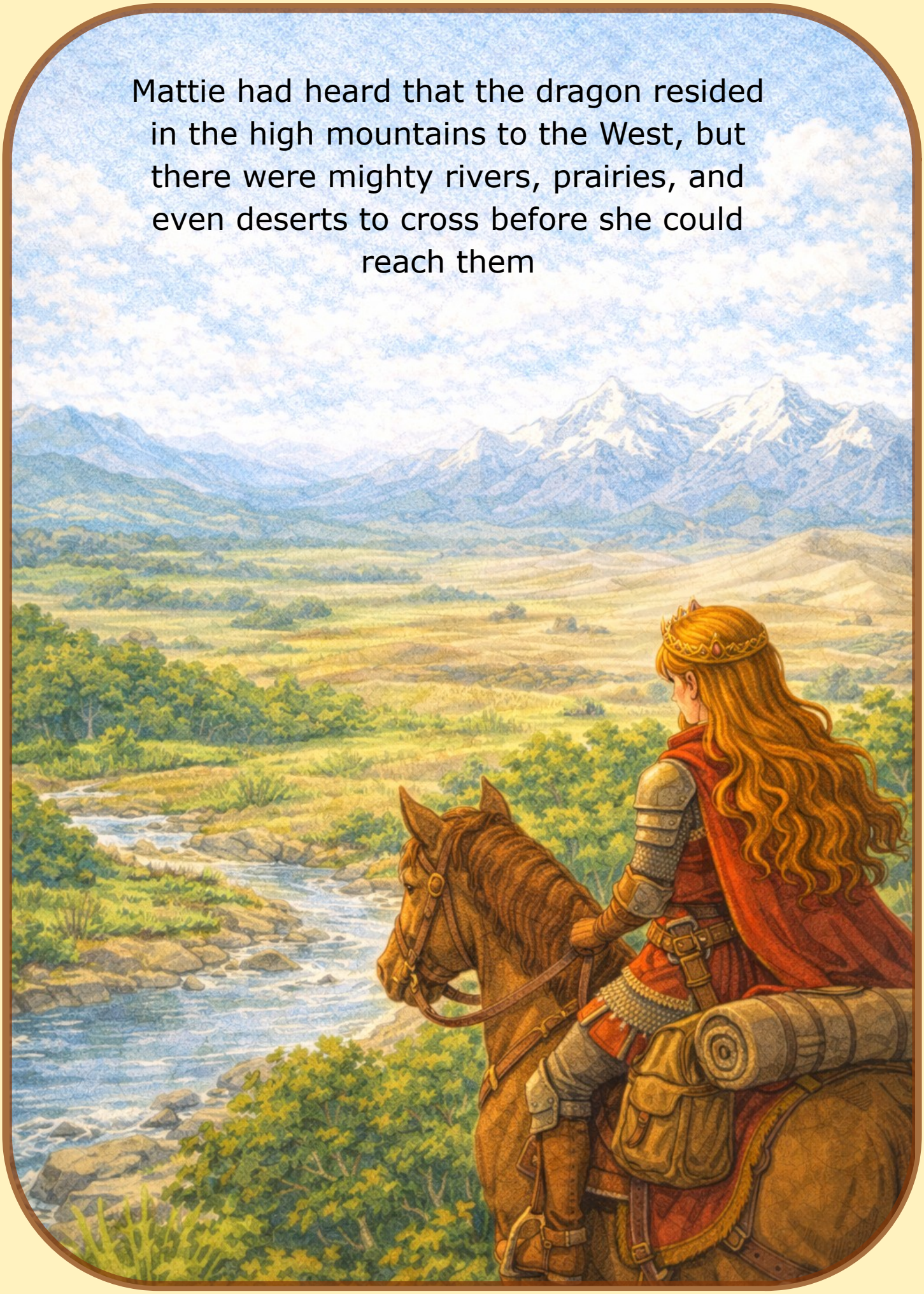


As the years passed by, Mattie began to suspect that none of these fine knights would succeed. Slowly she came to realize that if the treasure were to be found and returned, *she* would have to be the one to do it.

Quietly she began to train herself as an explorer, and she spent long hours studying with anyone who was willing to share their skills with her.

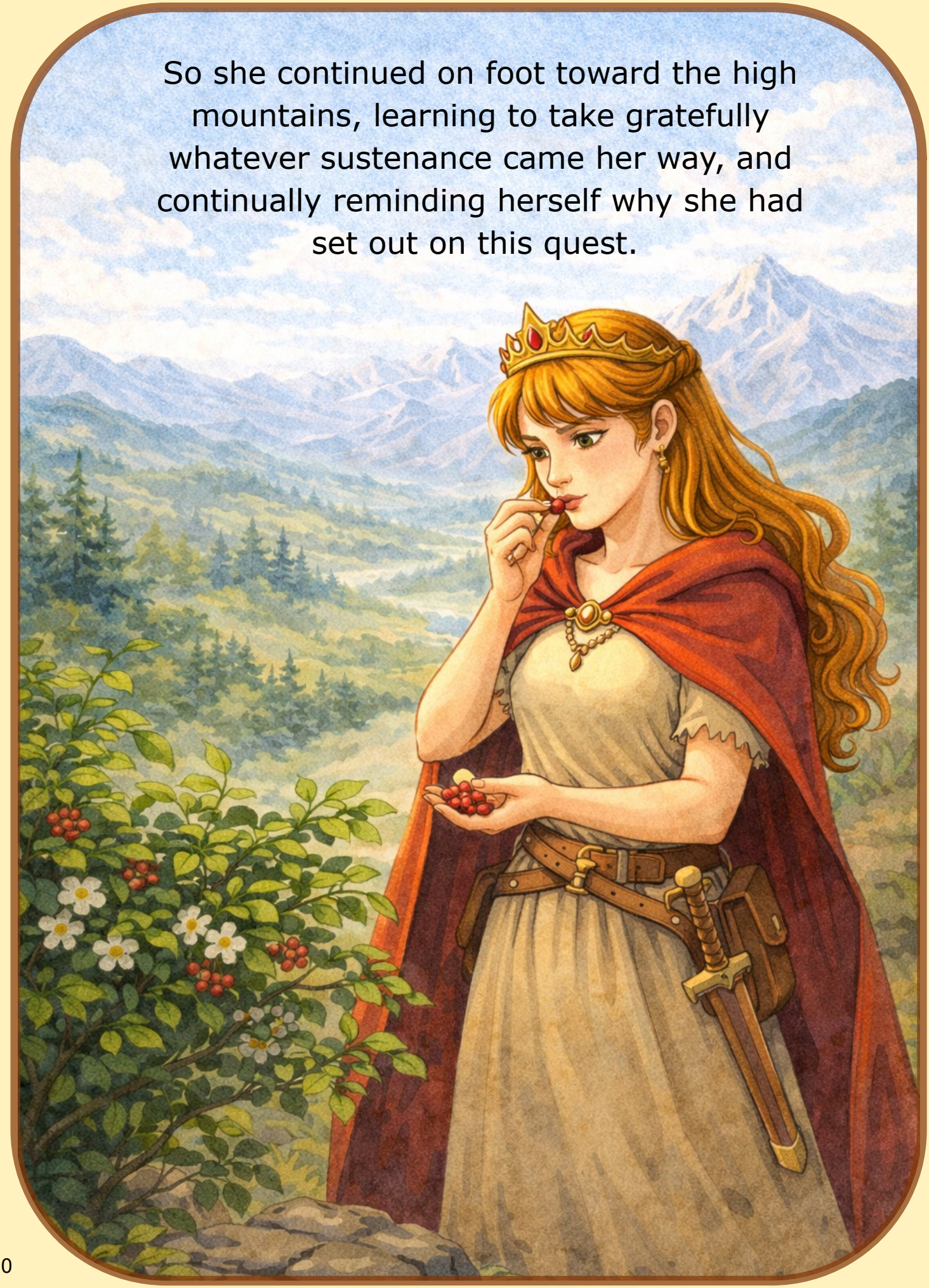
At last the day arrived when she knew she must depart. With some trepidation, she went to her father and told him of her plan. His face paled, for his love for her was great, and he feared much for her safety. But realizing that her heart was set, he finally gave his blessing and supplied her with a fine horse and supplies for her journey.

Mattie had heard that the dragon resided in the high mountains to the West, but there were mighty rivers, prairies, and even deserts to cross before she could reach them

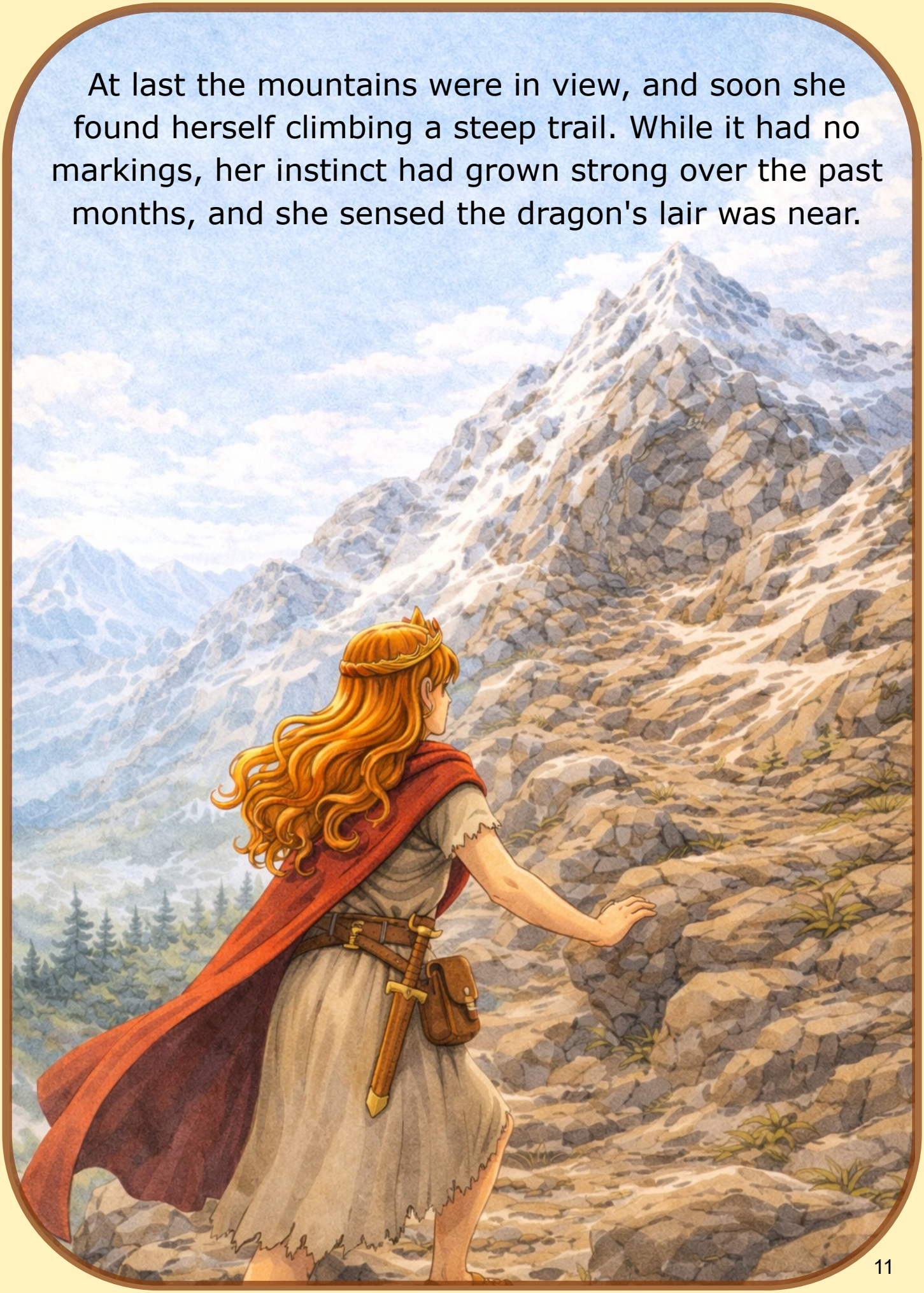


One night in a fierce storm, her horse ran off,
taking most of her supplies with him.
Distraught as she was with this setback,
Mattie knew she must go on.

So she continued on foot toward the high mountains, learning to take gratefully whatever sustenance came her way, and continually reminding herself why she had set out on this quest.

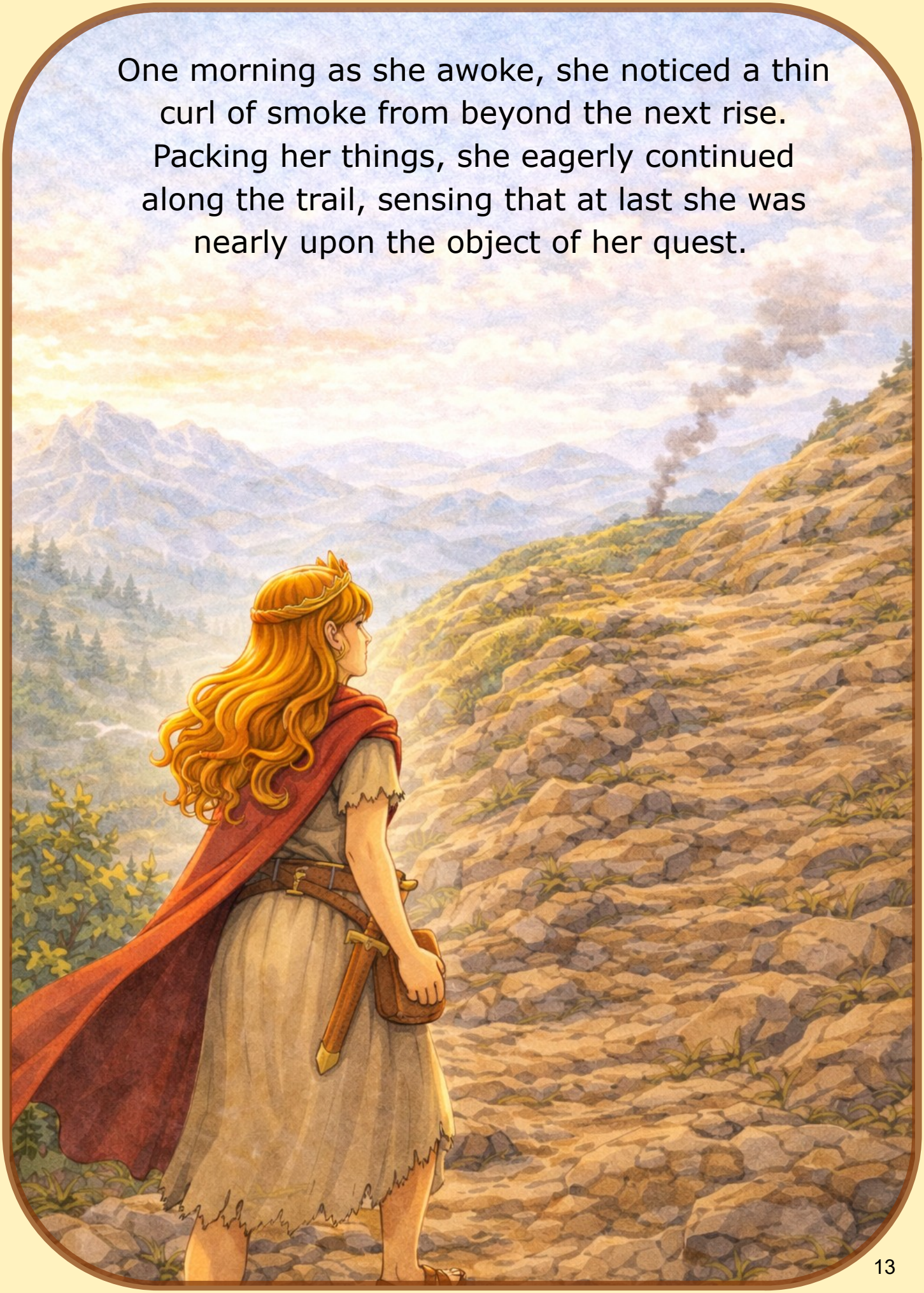


At last the mountains were in view, and soon she found herself climbing a steep trail. While it had no markings, her instinct had grown strong over the past months, and she sensed the dragon's lair was near.

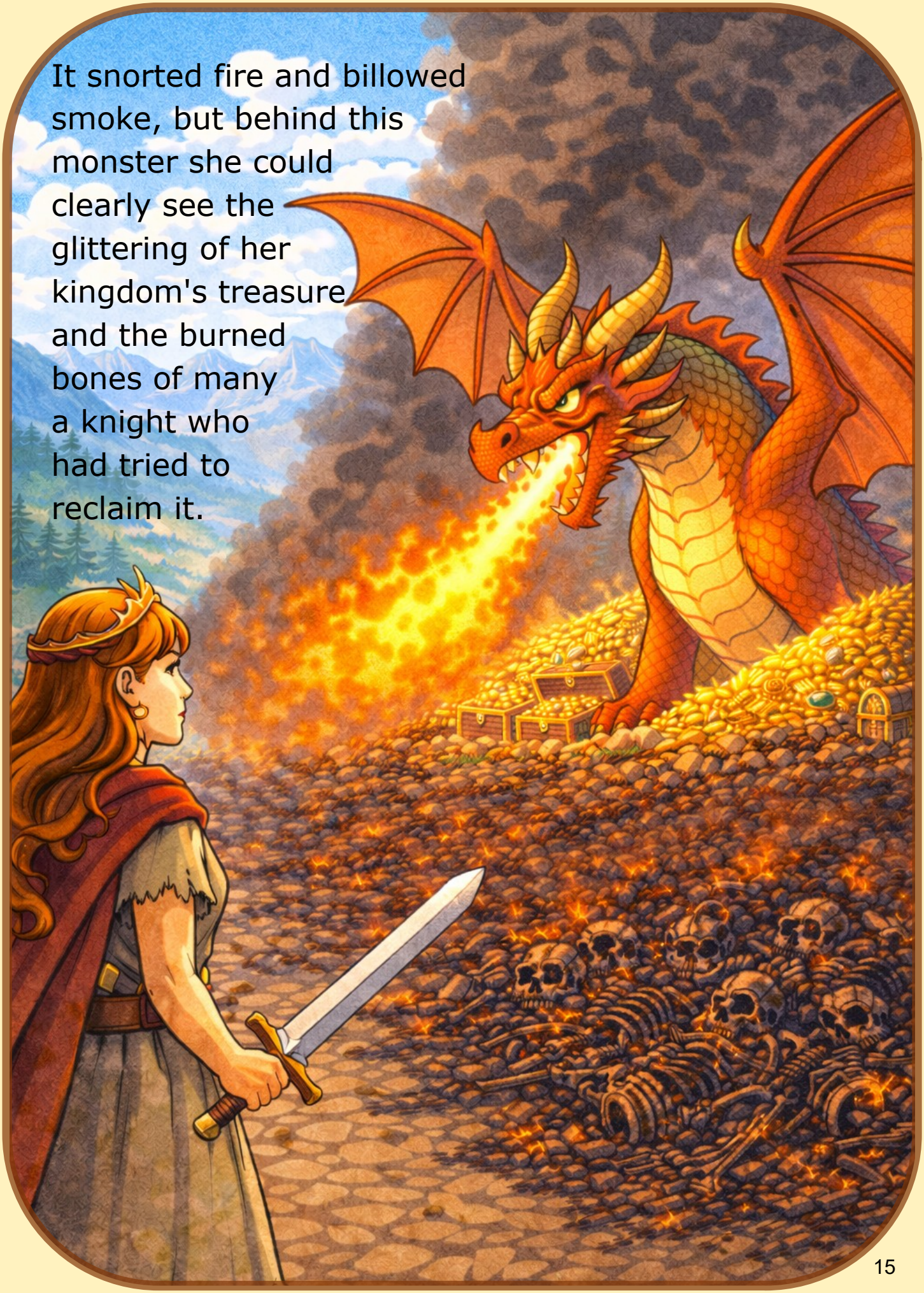


Tired though she was from her long journey,
as she gained altitude, a special kind of light
began to shine more brightly inside,
bringing her great peace.

One morning as she awoke, she noticed a thin curl of smoke from beyond the next rise. Packing her things, she eagerly continued along the trail, sensing that at last she was nearly upon the object of her quest.



Just before noon she rounded a bend and froze,
for there before her was the biggest,
most ferocious, most evil-smelling
thing she had ever seen.


It snorted fire and billowed smoke, but behind this monster she could clearly see the glittering of her kingdom's treasure and the burned bones of many a knight who had tried to reclaim it.

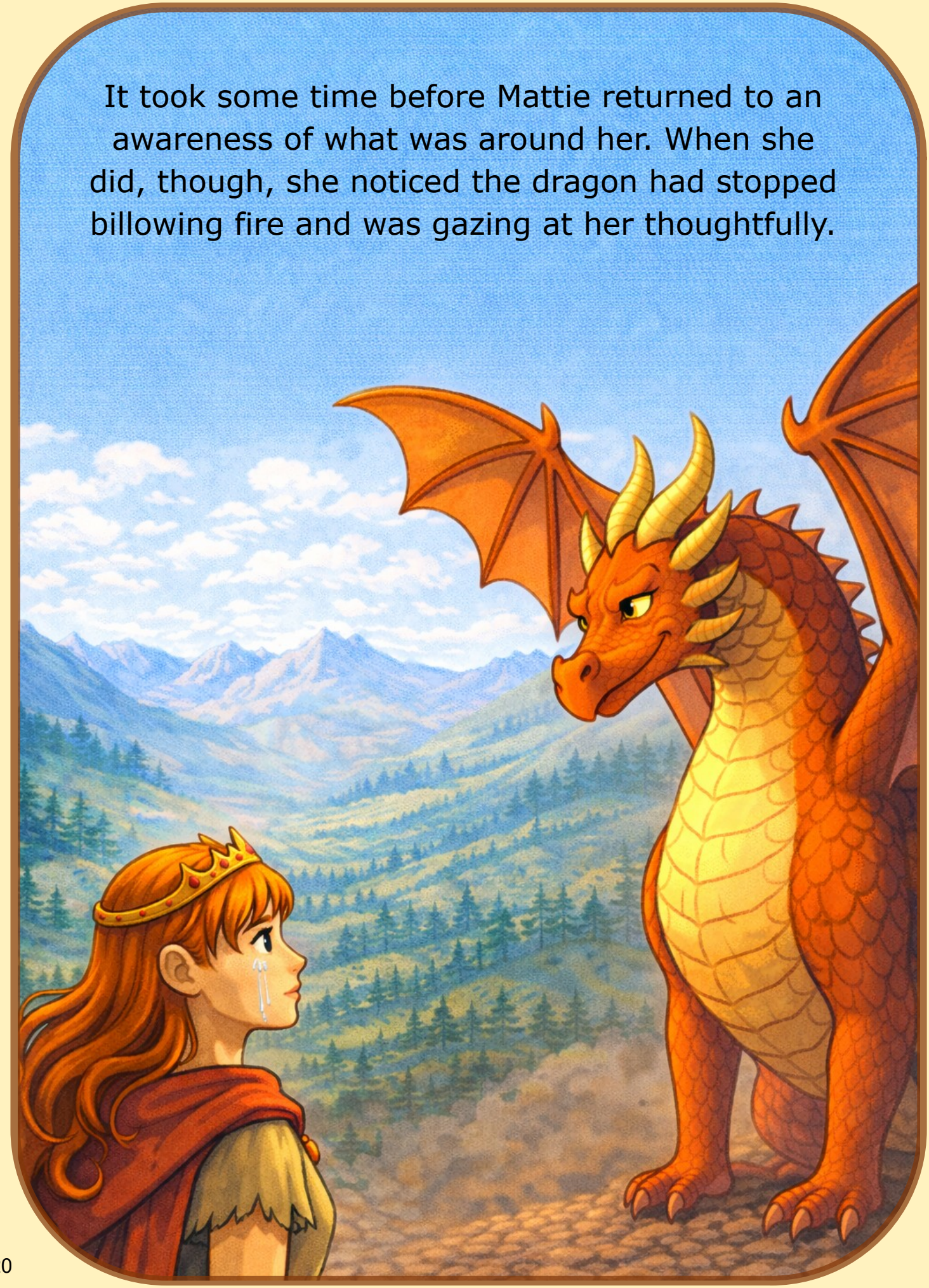
Reaching for the sword at her side, she was struck with how ridiculous this weapon was for fighting the dragon before her. Maybe it was her fear, or maybe it was her weariness from the journey, but for whatever reason, a grin slowly crept across her face.

She dropped her sword and found herself beginning to giggle. As the dragon snorted more fire, the giggles turned to laughter. As the dragon's roar became louder, her laughter too began to shake the ground.

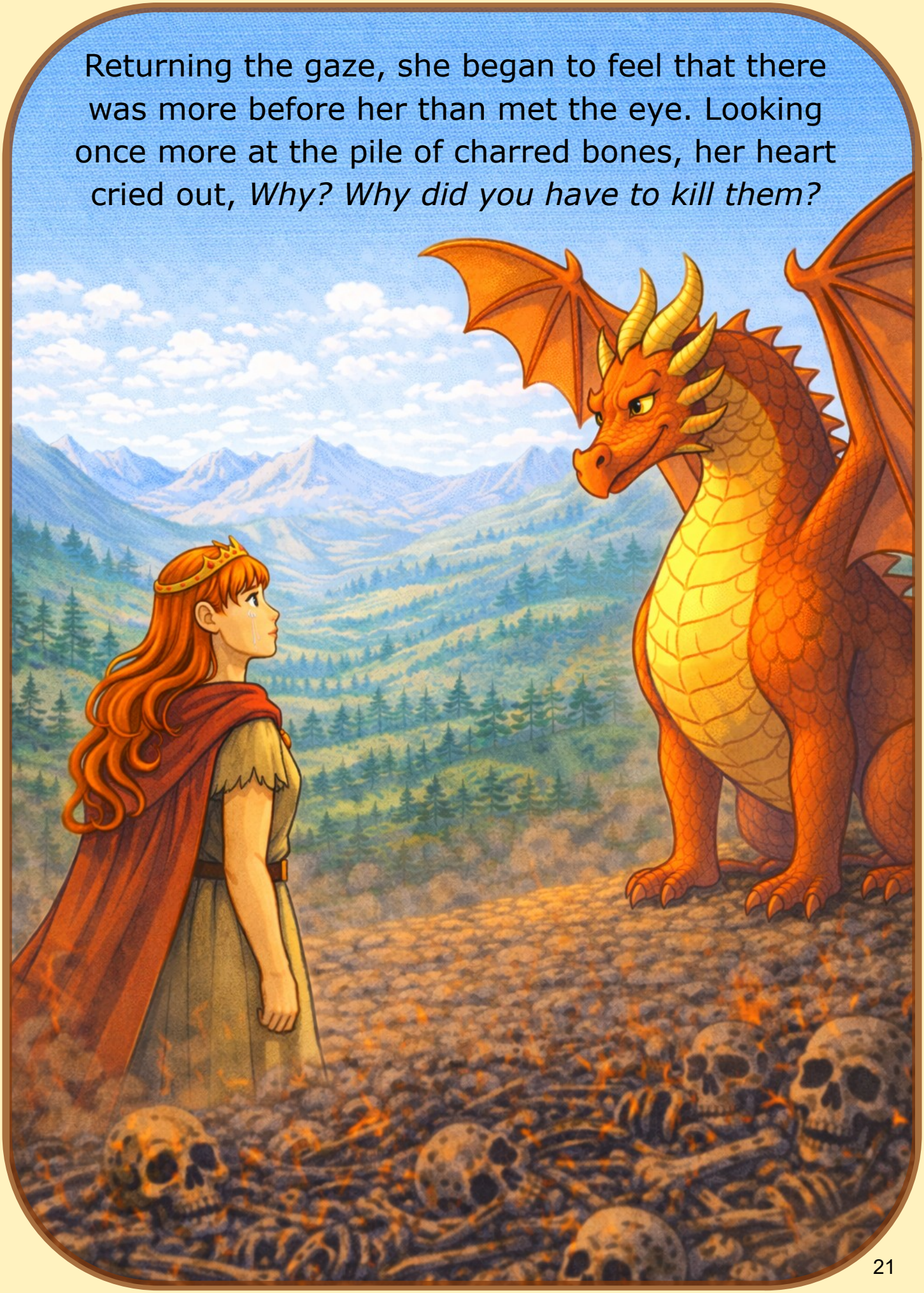
Even though she suspected she was going to be fried in the next moment, she couldn't help herself. It was so ludicrous, all those fine young men coming here to meet their death with nothing more then a tiny shaft of steel to protect them.

The more she thought about it, the harder she laughed, until gradually the tears of laughter became tears of mourning for these brave, if somewhat foolish, young men who had tried to help her kingdom and win her hand.

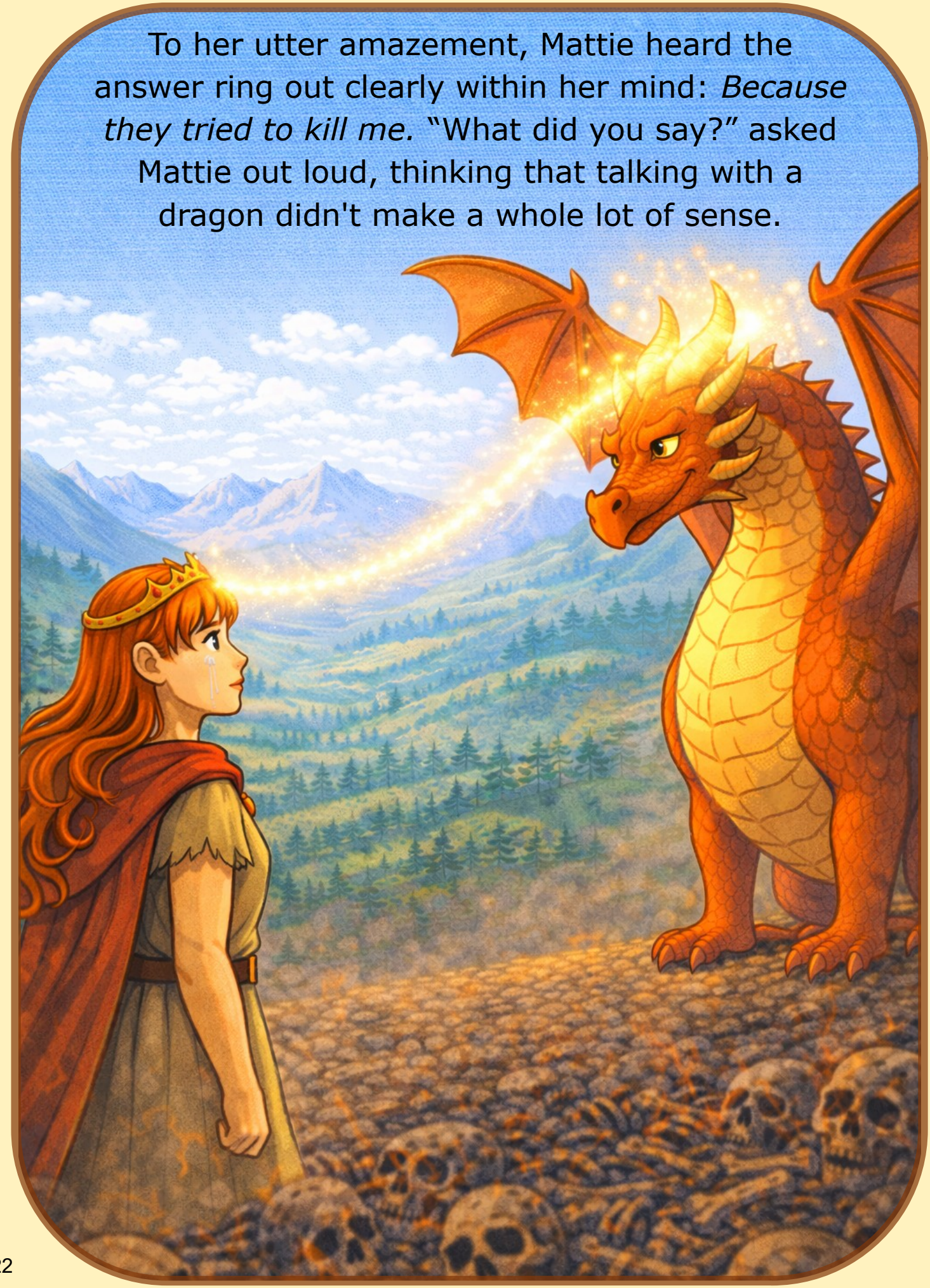
It took some time before Mattie returned to an awareness of what was around her. When she did, though, she noticed the dragon had stopped billowing fire and was gazing at her thoughtfully.



Returning the gaze, she began to feel that there was more before her than met the eye. Looking once more at the pile of charred bones, her heart cried out, *Why? Why did you have to kill them?*

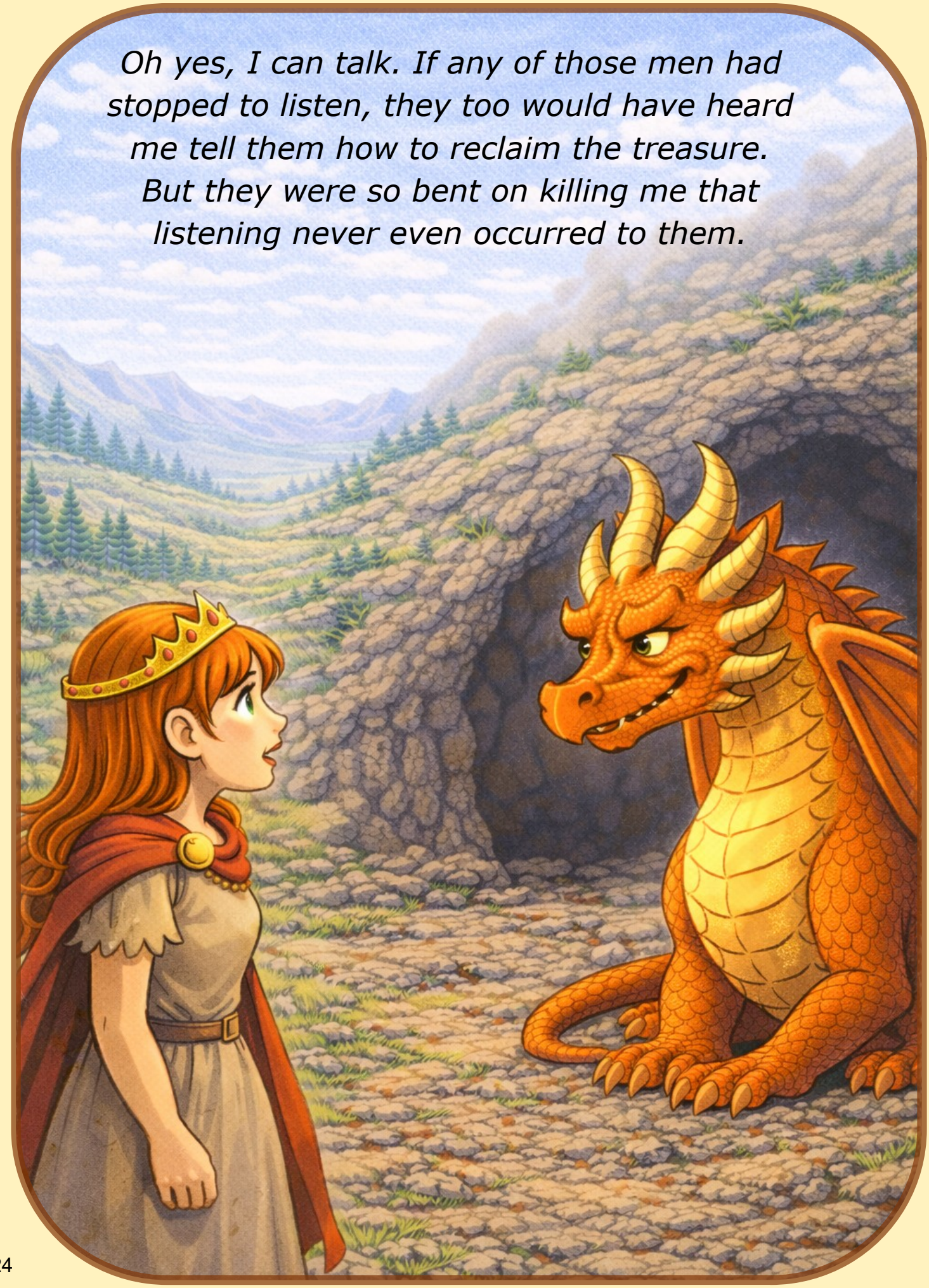


To her utter amazement, Mattie heard the answer ring out clearly within her mind: *Because they tried to kill me.* “What did you say?” asked Mattie out loud, thinking that talking with a dragon didn't make a whole lot of sense.



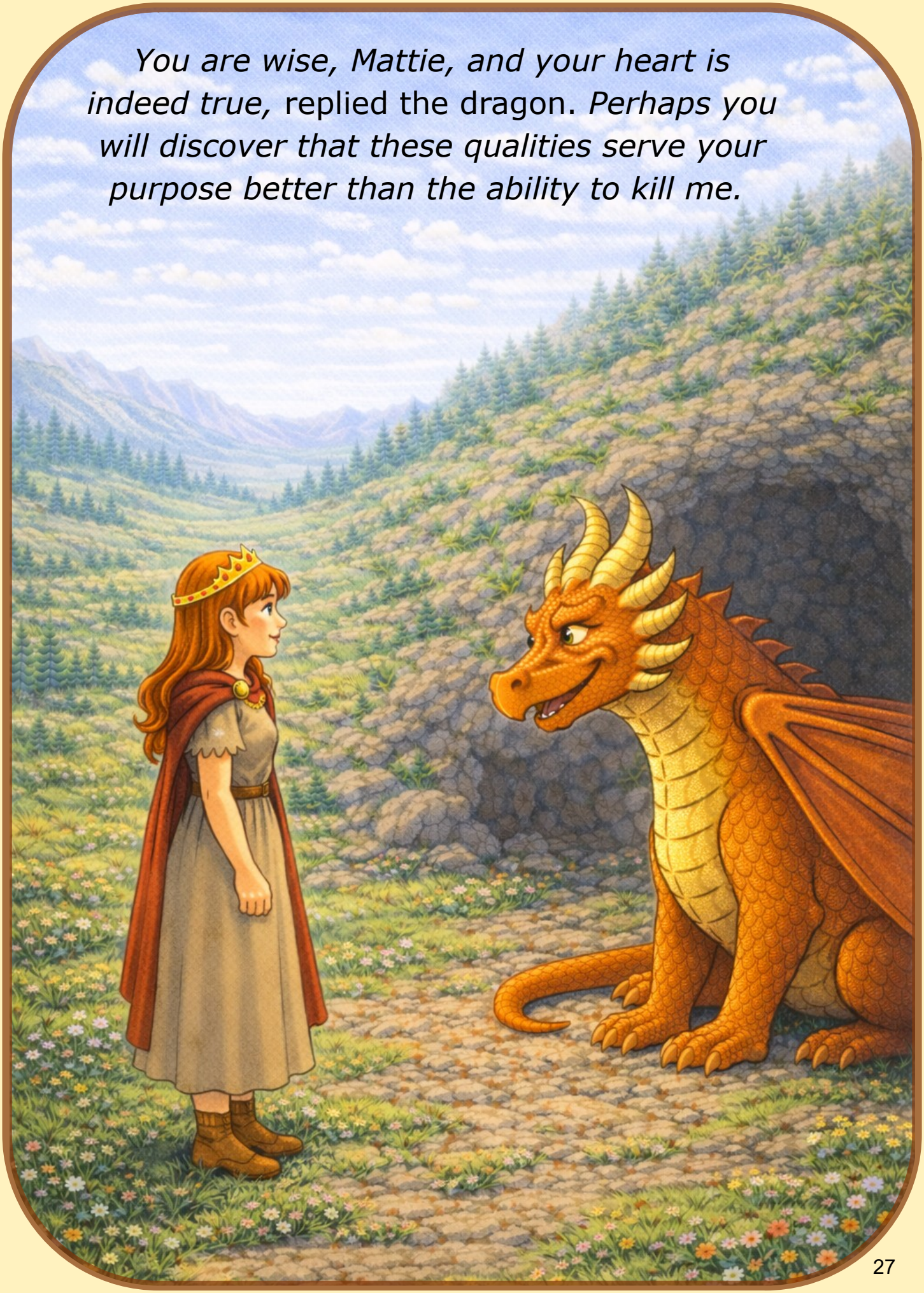
But of course it does, replied the dragon in her mind, *especially if you are really serious about having your kingdom's treasure returned.*

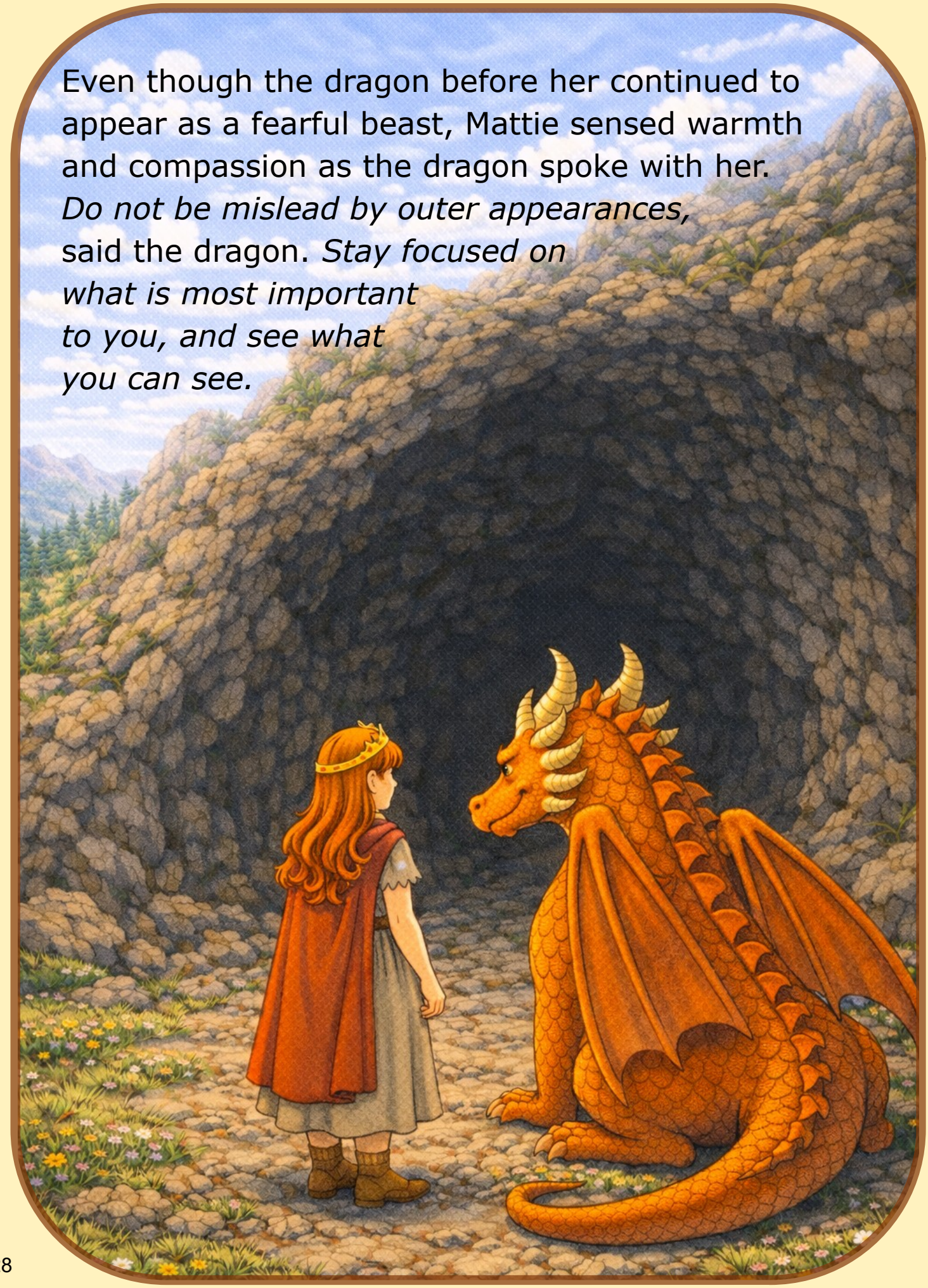
Mattie's jaw dropped open and, staring wide-eyed at the dragon, she heard clear as day:


Oh yes, I can talk. If any of those men had stopped to listen, they too would have heard me tell them how to reclaim the treasure. But they were so bent on killing me that listening never even occurred to them.

Regaining her composure, Mattie stood up, introduced herself, and asked the dragon's name. *I have many names, Mattie,* replied the dragon, *but you may call me Counselor.* "That's a good name," said Mattie, "because I could really use some counsel about now."

So she told the dragon of her life in the impoverished kingdom, of all the men who offered to help but couldn't, of her quest, and of her new awareness that trying to kill the dragon would not help regain her kingdom's treasure.

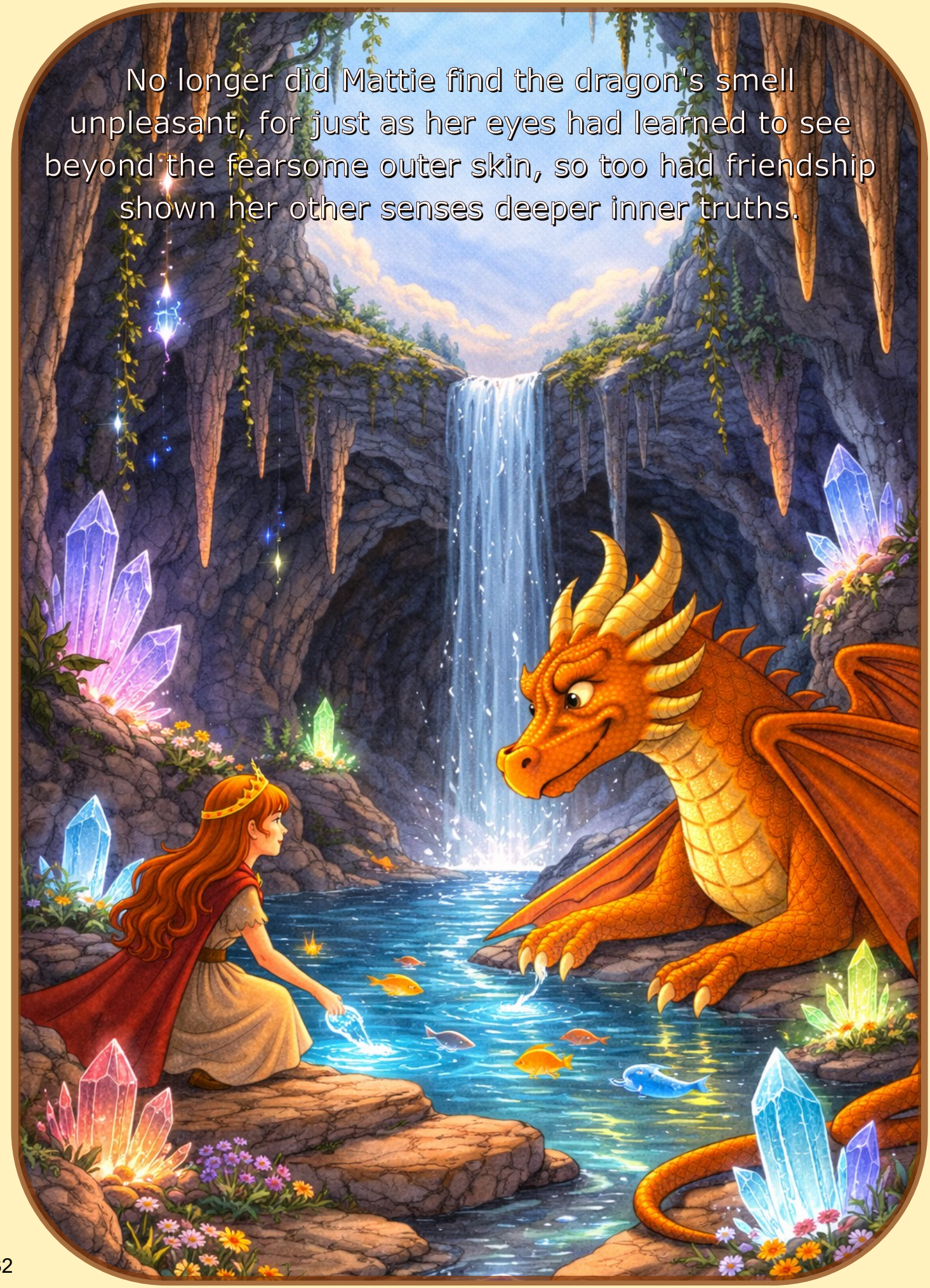

You are wise, Mattie, and your heart is indeed true, replied the dragon. *Perhaps you will discover that these qualities serve your purpose better than the ability to kill me.*


Even though the dragon before her continued to appear as a fearful beast, Mattie sensed warmth and compassion as the dragon spoke with her.
Do not be mislead by outer appearances, said the dragon. *Stay focused on what is most important to you, and see what you can see.*

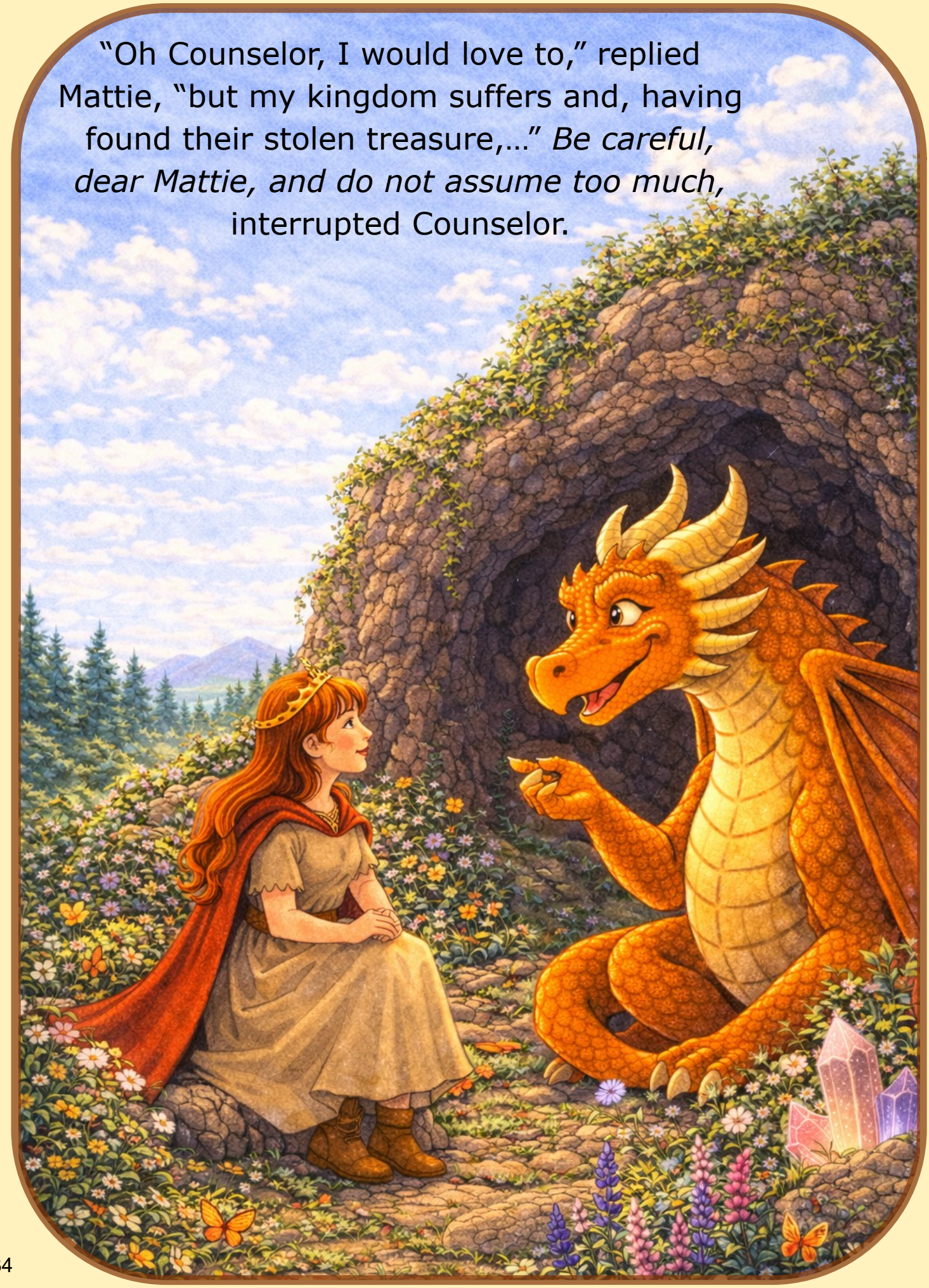
For the rest of the afternoon Mattie and Counselor spoke of many things. Gradually Mattie found the courage to come closer, and the dragon allowed her to explore the cave where the treasure was kept.

It was vast beyond measure, and Mattie had to laugh as she considered the impossibility of a single knight getting much of it back to the kingdom even if he had vanquished the dragon.

But Mattie was no longer thinking in terms of conquering this noble being. She had learned much that afternoon, and she sensed that Counselor was willing to be her friend. That night Counselor shared delicious food with Mattie and showed her a soft place to sleep curled up on its warm body.

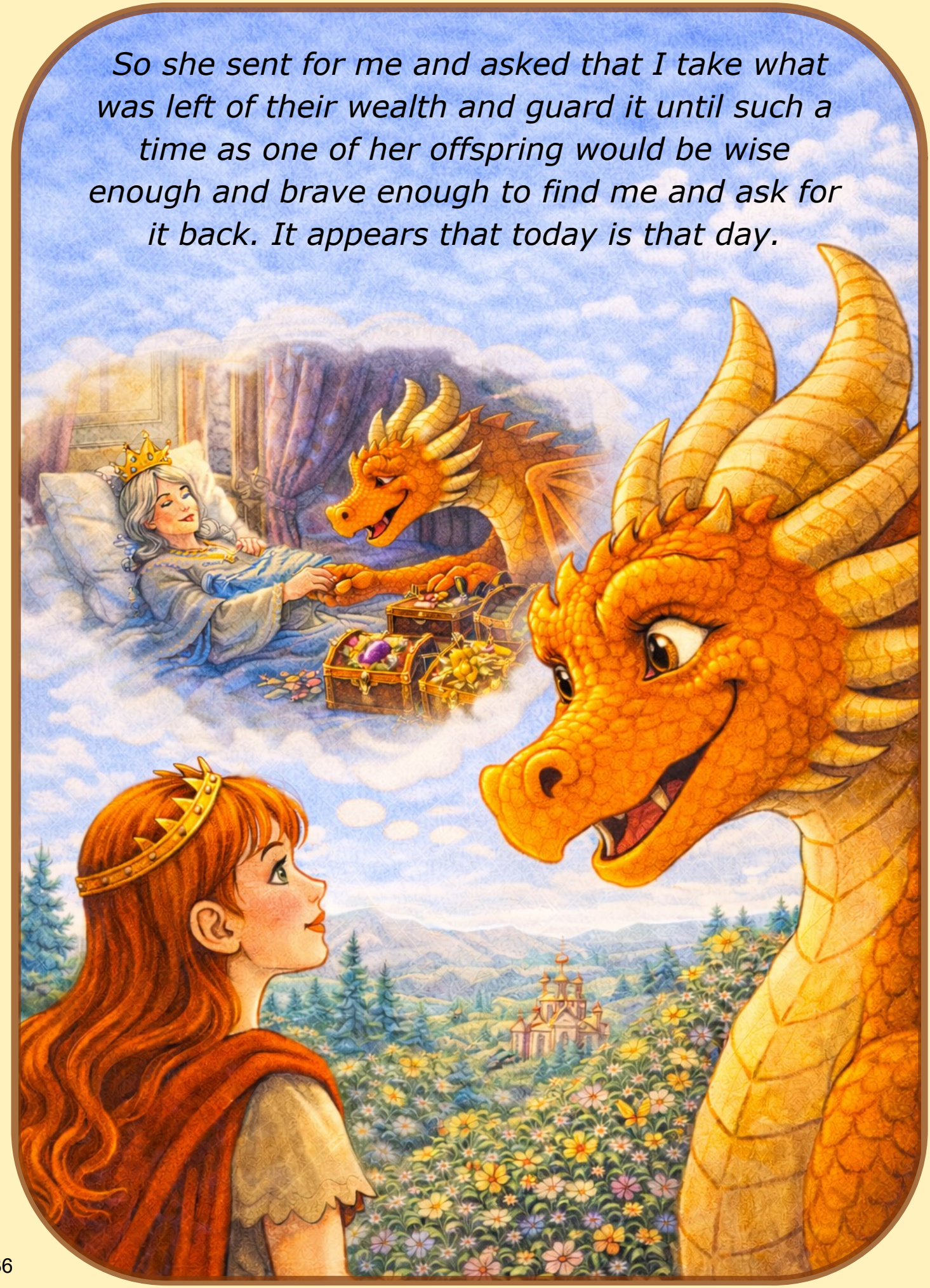

No longer did Mattie find the dragon's smell unpleasant, for just as her eyes had learned to see beyond the fearsome outer skin, so too had friendship shown her other senses deeper inner truths.

In the morning, Mattie and Counselor conferred once more. *Stay here with me,* suggested Counselor, *and I will teach you dragon lore and help you continue to unfold your wisdom.*

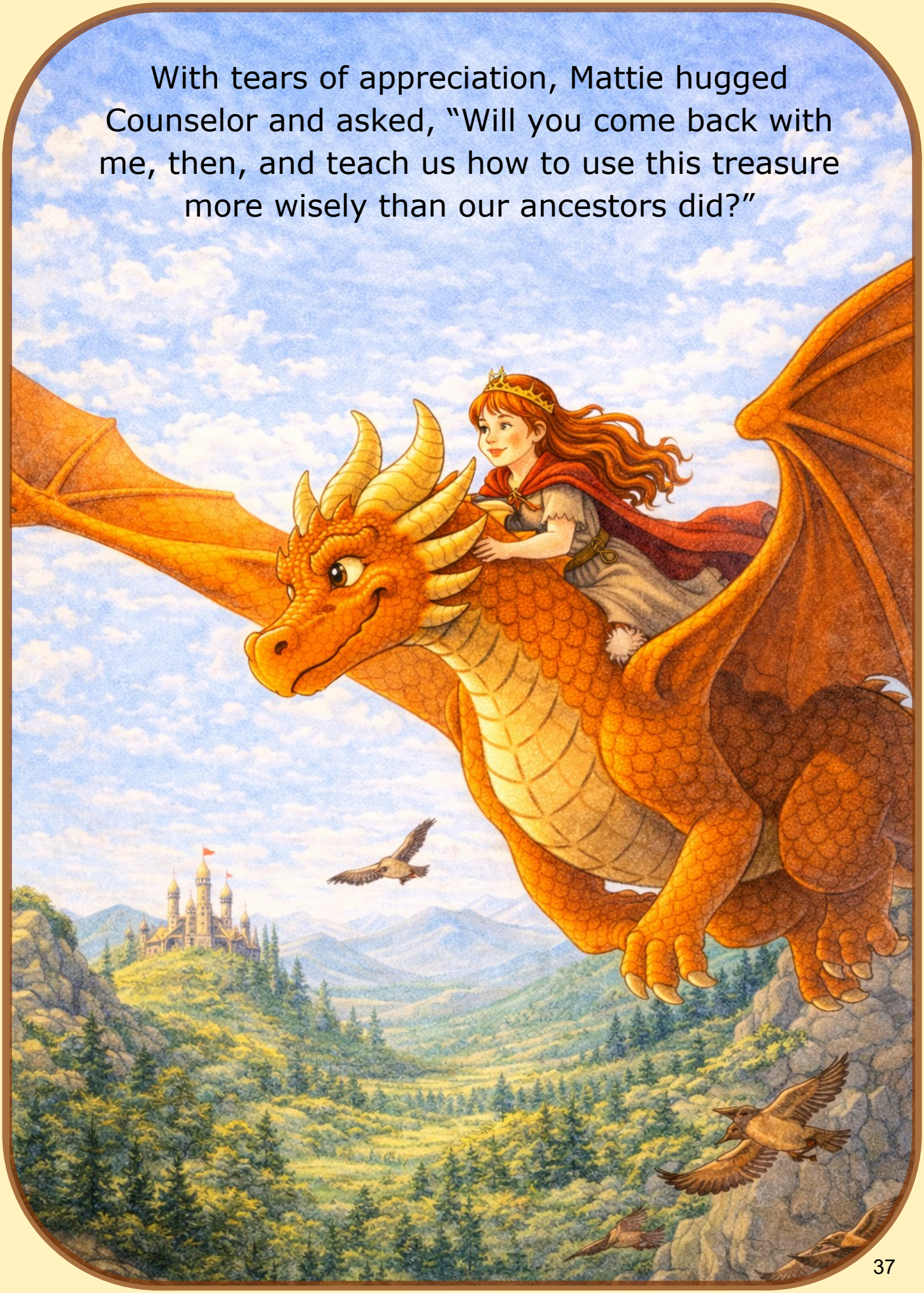

"Oh Counselor, I would love to," replied Mattie, "but my kingdom suffers and, having found their stolen treasure,…" *Be careful, dear Mattie, and do not assume too much,* interrupted Counselor.

It is true that many years ago I came and took this treasure from your kingdom. But what you don't know is that it was a time of great stupidity, and the treasure was being squandered. The Queen then was a good woman, but ill and dying, and she feared for her people.

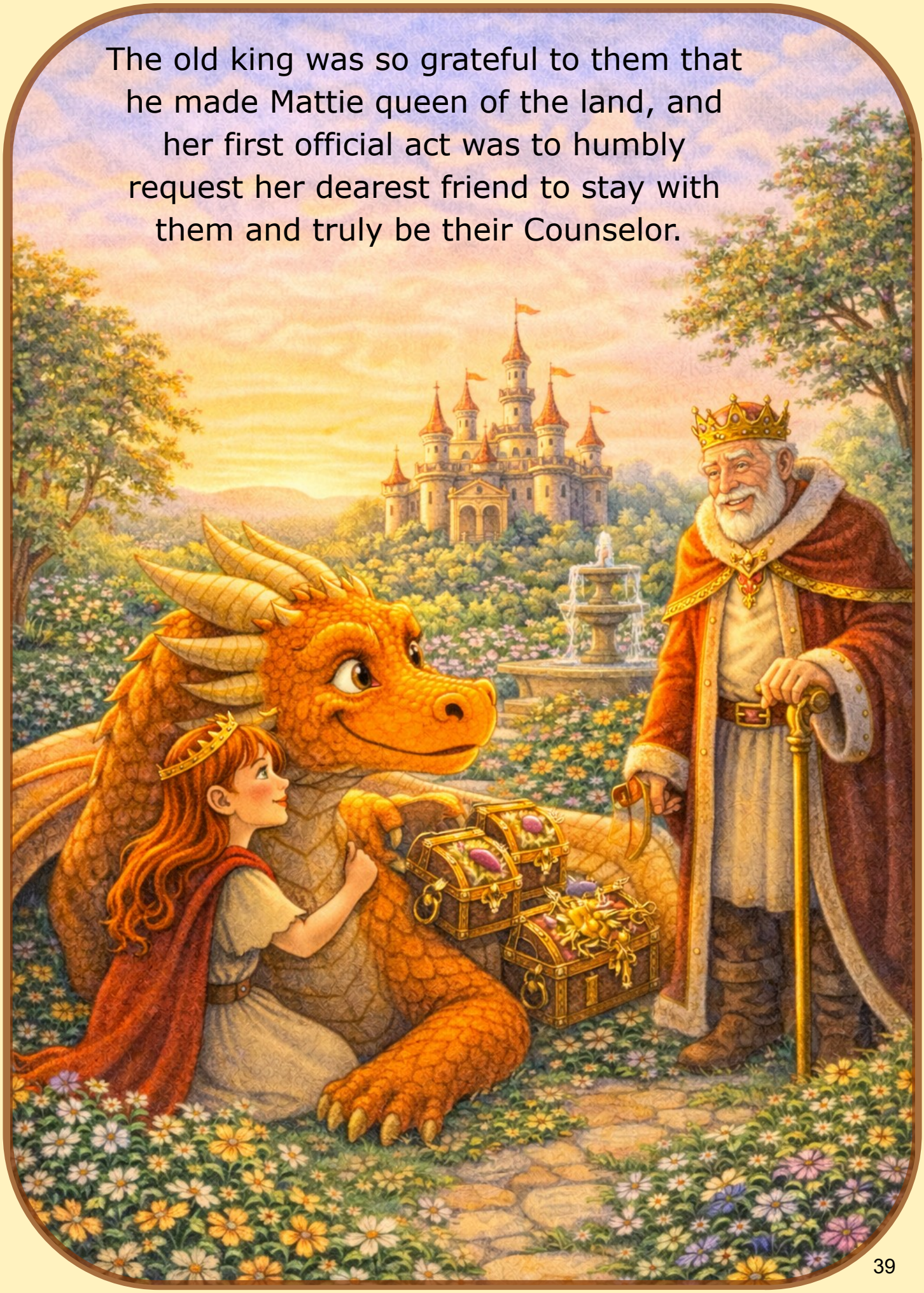
So she sent for me and asked that I take what was left of their wealth and guard it until such a time as one of her offspring would be wise enough and brave enough to find me and ask for it back. It appears that today is that day.



With tears of appreciation, Mattie hugged Counselor and asked, “Will you come back with me, then, and teach us how to use this treasure more wisely than our ancestors did?”



Counselor agreed, and over the coming weeks, Mattie and Counselor flew many times from the lair to the kingdom, distributing treasure and teaching the people to honor their returning wealth.


The old king was so grateful to them that he made Mattie queen of the land, and her first official act was to humbly request her dearest friend to stay with them and truly be their Counselor.

The anonymous author is now
retired and practicing meditation,
seeking the "treasure" hidden within every heart.

Human illustrators are invited to bring their
uniquely human vision to an additional version
of this storybook. You are also encouraged
to translate this story into your native language
and illustrate as appropriate for that culture.

May your inner "Counselor" guide you.

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Mattie.and.the.dragon@gmail.com